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Bishop Echevarría on World Youth Day

Bishop Echevarría spoke about the meaning of World Youth Day on Aug. 13, just before leaving for Cologne.

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During the unforgettable welcoming ceremony for World Youth Day 2000 in Rome, John Paul II asked the young people there: "What have you come to seek? Whom have you come to seek?" These ardent words were spoken by a man of advanced age who loved with a young heart, and

who could infuse his own love for Christ into the hearts of other young people. The World Youth Days have always drawn young people from all over the world to come to see the Pope, in search of Christ. Many great things will result from this personal encounter with the Lord, both in the life of each person, and in the life of the whole Church and of society.

Upon inaugurating his pontificate, Benedict XVI proclaimed that the Church is young, that the Church is alive. The Church is alive, he said, because Christ is alive. The history of the Church is made up of many personal stories of friendship with Jesus. "Only with this friendship," the Pope tells us, "are the doors of life opened. Only with this friendship are the great potentialities of the human condition truly opened. Only with this friendship do we experience what is beautiful and what frees us." We are going to Cologne eager to

savor yet again the Church's perennial youth, made vibrant through friendship with Jesus Christ.

In the women and men of today, and especially in young people, we see a great hunger for something to hope in, a longing for meaning and happiness, a desire to find something worth giving one's life for. And, at the same time, we see doubts, rebellion against injustice, awareness of one's own weaknesses, and at times fear.

These anxieties find their answer only in Christ; these shadows are dissipated only by his light.

As he began his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI also said that the Church holds in her hands the future of the world. This future depends directly on young people. On the generosity of youth depends in great part the growth of the Church herself. Young people are the bearers

of Christ's message to their own generation and to future ones. They are called to spread the seed of charity, the seed of chastity, which is an expression of true love. Now when the world seems to be distancing itself more and more from God, we need to realize that the world needs God more than ever: today, more than ever, the world needs the joy of the young people who are Christ's disciples.

The Pope has granted those taking part in this gathering the possibility of earning a plenary indulgence. Thus he reminds us that personal friendship with Jesus, which is the source of joy, passes through the sacraments: Christ who pardons us in Confession and Christ who gives himself to us in the Eucharist.

The Sacrifice of the Altar is the center and the theme of this World Youth Day, and of this whole Year.

The catechesis that precedes the arrival of the Holy Father, the Vigil on Saturday and the Mass on Sunday, are centered on Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist: "We have come to worship him," as the Wise Men came to Bethlehem.

Pray that everyone who takes part in these days in Cologne may undergo a conversion, and ask for it in first place for me. We have to be convinced that it is always possible to convert ourselves once again, to change our heart.

We need the conviction that it is urgent to follow Jesus closely, "in accord with the vocation that God has indicated to each one" (Decree on the Indulgences granted on the occasion of the 20th World Youth Day, August 8, 2005). God's call resounds in each one's soul, as something very intimate and personal. And our response also has

repercussions for our own environment, for the society to which we belong. Saying "yes" to God means giving a sense of service to one's life, placing oneself at the disposition of others.

Perhaps we need to overcome a certain natural fear that everyone experiences when facing great decisions that call for a commitment. "Have no fear!" In these words of Christ, repeated by our beloved John Paul II, we will find the daring that we need. This call was echoed from the first day by Pope Benedict XVI: "Whoever allows Christ to enter loses nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great." Christ gives everything and takes away nothing. It is worthwhile taking up this marvelous challenge.

+ Javier Echevarría

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